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CONSERVATORIES.

"How summerlike!" The last time I went New Year's calling—some years ago—the above expression fell almost without variation, from the lips of dozens of visitors to a house where taste holds sway. The occasion of the remark was an improvised conservatory, made up of a back room, which luckily had a large bay window, seen through an archway, and crammed with the spoils of sundry hothouses, for the owner of the mansion is a notable cultivator of rare, curious, beautiful and odorous plants. It struck me at the time that a permanent conservatory would have been a handsomer arrangement, and would not necessitate the trouble and expense of moving in and moving out these beautiful flowers every time the hostess wanted to add the blossoms of nature to her other decorations.

We neglect conservatories too much in this country. At churches and private houses most charming floral displays are often made, but there is an air of incongruity about them that, as it were, throws a shade on their brilliance. Plants are placed everywhere but where they could grow naturally, and the effect is artificial in the extreme, and inartistic in effect. It is forcing growing plants into unnatural competition with cut flowers. Why we should so generally omit proper provision for flowers is not easy to understand. They grow here luxuriantly, and are comparatively inexpensive and not troublesome to keep in good order. We spend a good deal of money in unnecessarily magnificent stables, and we also spend a great deal of money in the fitful adornment of our festive halls, which could be more judiciously applied.

Few people in England, who live in any sort of comfort, are without some "flower room," or conservatory, as a permanent part of the house. The very wealthy, who have ranges of hothouses and greenhouses in their grounds, surpassing the most superb of the vaunted winter gardens of Russia, are not content without some sort of receptacle for flowers, which will always be beautiful, and which will do away with the necessity of turning the whole establishment upside down every time floral decoration is considered desirable.

With people of moderate means, who have no hothouses or greenhouses, the necessity of a conservatory is apparently as much felt as the need for a front door or a cooking range. They simply cannot exist without it, and from the cottage *ornée*, on the smiling Thames, to the stucco villas in the suburbs, one sees the little conservatory perched everywhere, and always so as to be a prominent factor of the interior decoration.

Now this is what we want here. It is a good fashion, and it ought to be started. It is a fashion that would keep on spreading, and would be a boon to the florists. Some of the more short-sighted of these may be dismayed at the prospect of their customers raising their own bouquets and lessening the orders for flowers for dinners, balls, weddings and funerals, but before long they would have more than they could do to supply their fast growing trade. Few things are more fascinating than flowers, few are pursued with such patient diligence, with a toil that is not grudged, because it is not felt. It is neither irksome, un-

cleanly or troublesome for the daintiest lady to fuss among the flowers, and, indeed, once interested, she is irresistibly drawn to spend profitable moments in watering and clipping and otherwise tending them.

Far be it from us to disparage any yearnings after the beautiful, but one cannot go astray in properly caring for flowers, and it is quite possible to get very far off the track when bitten by the craze for ceramics, or tapestry, or Oriental rugs. Their inanimate expressions of human skill are, even at their best, afflicted with one incurable attribute, monotony. There is no change possible to them except destruction or decay. A blue plate to-day will be a blue plate a thousand years hence, unless it chance to be broken, and variety is only partially obtainable by rearrangement with other decorative features of an apartment. Tapestry and rugs may be moth-eaten and frescoed walls mildewed. Plants, too, are subject to decay and death, but they have the glorious possibilities of growth.

for instance, to read the papers and smoke an after-breakfast cigar in than a glass court, with Moorish dome and fretted arches on slender pillars, with the delicate carvings of the marble uncolored, because the polychrome tints would all be abundantly supplied by the flowers? Let there be a fountain in the centre, possibly some singing birds, broad gravel or tiled paths, and the flowers arranged without crowding, as in a hothouse. Let the air be sweet with roses and jasmine, and not too much stress given to the collection of mere rarities or oddities. The place would be delightful, and the burning tobacco would be a beneficial incense to the vegetation. Soft music pouring in from the great northern portal connecting this modern Alhambra with the more prosaic comforts of the nineteenth century, would be a welcome addition to these comforts for any one with music in his soul.

We cannot all be millionaires, but it is within the reach of many of quite small incomes to make

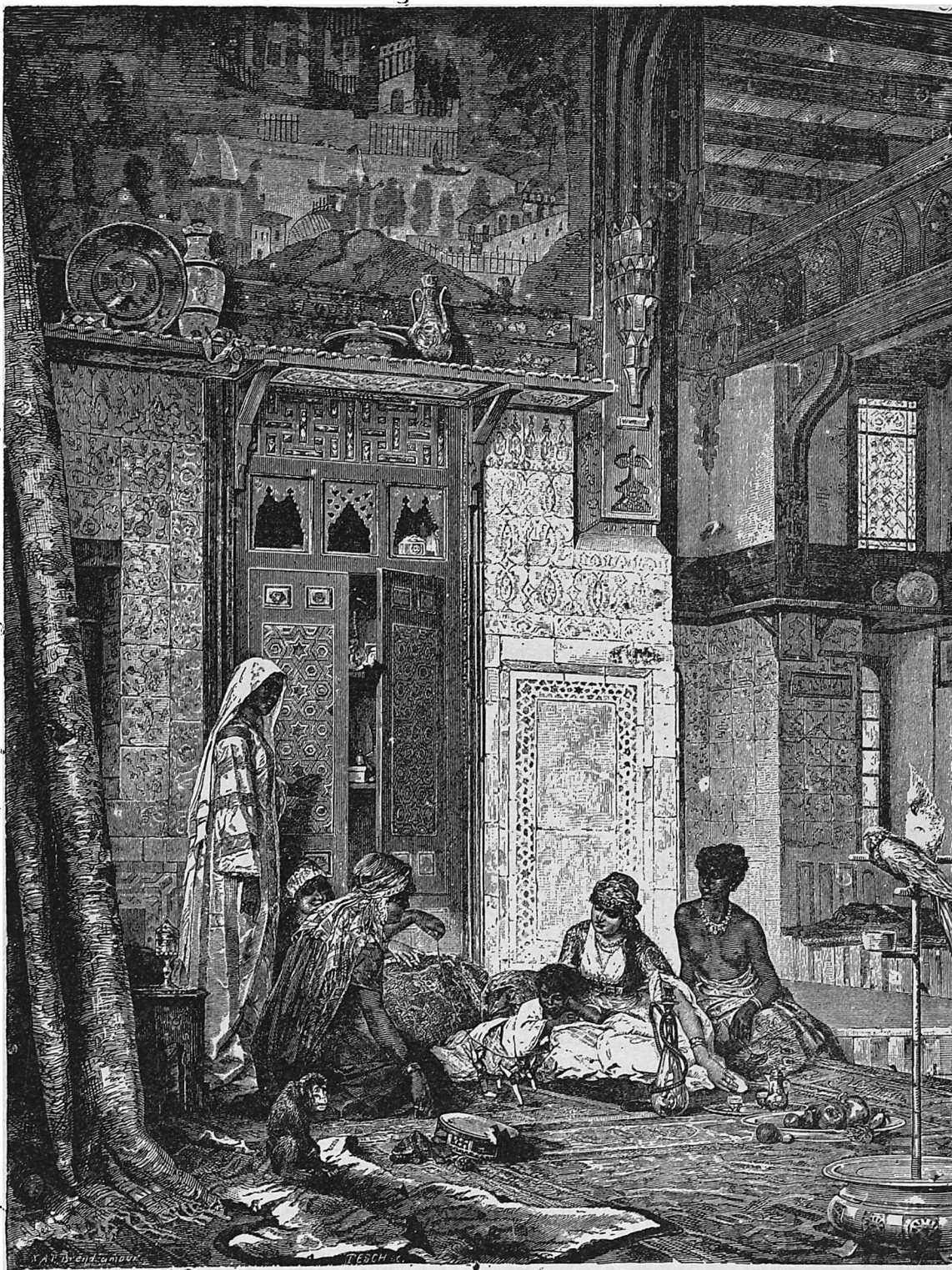
life pleasanter by means of a good-sized bay window, not a little ornamental recess, just large enough for a gilt chair not meant to be sat upon, but a good wholesome oblong affair, say twelve feet by six, with folding glass doors to the room. The top and sides should be practically all glass. In such a conservatory a beautiful selection of flowering creepers can be raised, and enough of choice blossoming and odoriferous plants, as to make the atmosphere of the adjoining room delightful. With the knowledge gained by experience, such a little winter-garden would not be beyond the care of any lady, who need not call in the assistance of any gardener.

Such a sensible bay-window would be useful in summer, as a sort of miniature verandah, when most of the plants had departed for summer duty in the beds on the lawn, and with an awning over the top and windows and door, with steps leading to garden left wide open, would materially assist in keeping the inner apartment cool, as its intervention between Jack Frost and the interior would keep the latter warm in winter. Of course in mild weather such a conservatory bay might be sufficiently heated from the room, but in severe weather a separate register from the furnace or a portable gas or oil stove, would supply all needed extra warmth.

The main idea of a conservatory should be decorative. It should not be overcrowded with plants. Hothouses are intended for that, as

they are for the culture of tropical plants. All we need in a conservatory is what will look pretty or smell sweetly, or both, and thrive at a moderate temperature. The conservatory is no place for scientific experiments nor a cabinet of plant curiosities. Its chief recommendation should be that so much pleasure can be gotten out of it with so little trouble.

As to whether a conservatory should be adorned with colored glass, I am inclined to think a little of this, a very little, in a decorative sort of way, may not be out of place, but I would deprecate all attempts to force unnatural growth by blue glass or yellow glass, or any fad of the kind. Let all that be done elsewhere. The conservatory must not be desecrated by any taint of the workshop. And for the same reason I cannot go into raptures with the educational or other benefits of miniature window-gardens, fern cases, etc.



INTERIOR OF CAIRENE HOUSE, SHOWING ARAB DECORATION.

Without being a botanist, or indulging in any expensive freaks, there is a certain reward for tender care of plants in the satisfaction at their improvement. And to realize this enjoyment fully one needs to have one's interest always kept alive, in fact, one must have a conservatory, which will brighten up the house, and give pleasing daily occupations in winter as well as in summer.

Many will object that this will be costly, that gardeners will be needed, that a conservatory will make the house "mussy," and so on. The flower-room need not be costly at all, though as a matter of personal taste I should certainly recommend it to be "as costly as thy purse can buy," consistently with due justice to other requisites for comfort and prudence. There are less satisfactory ways for a wealthy man to dispose of his money than in a handsome conservatory, needing the skilled attendance of several gardeners.

What more enchanting room could one have,